



MINISTERS FORUM NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION MINISTERS CAN USE

MINISTERING TO THE DISABLED POPULATION – PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)



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We serve a God who does things "in the fullness of times" (Exodus 2:23-25; Galatians 4:4) and in perfect season (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Psalm 30:5). (KJV)



Leviticus 19:14; Deut.27:18; Psalms 41:1; Matthew 4: 23; 15:30; Luke 14:12-14(KJV)

Greetings to you Ministers of the Most High God and father of us all. In this month's Newsletter our focus is on ministering to 'Persons with Disabilities'. Secular societies have found it easier than a number of Christians to accept persons with disabilities resulting in the church lacking in many ways to accept and care for the most vulnerable among us. While many do not understand why they are different we do not give the opportunity for the Spirit of God to speak to such persons at his or her level of comprehension.

For the past four (4) years I have been lecturing Social Workers and has been teaching the subject -Introduction to Disability Studies and it has really opened my eyes to the challenges, misconceptions of both people in and out of the church world and their perceptions and treatment of Persons with Disabilities; and I finds it most unfortunate and ungodly. In a culture that worship physical perfection, the church must protect the helpless, vulnerable – including this population as they are people possessing dignity, value and purpose.

For the rest of this discussion the statement put forward on August 11, 2000 by General Assemblies of God will be explored and element included for your consideration on ministering to persons with disabilities. Acknowledgement of Pentecostal evangelicals belief that miracles still happen today but sometimes have difficulty dealing with people with permanent disabilities and who are not healed after much prayer is often baffling and begs for biblical explanation for those who are not immediately healed or made whole.

Many have accepted death by old age and even by accident; but the constant reminders of many with Intellectual (mental) and physical disabilities, who are not restored to full health and activity, seem to suggest that our belief or our faith is faulty or weak. We affirm that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:81); that He heals, His miracles confirm His deity, omnipotence, and faithfulness to His promises; we preach the biblical truth of His healing power, even though divine power does not respond immediately to every human plea and desire and that though His ways are beyond our understanding (Romans 11:33), we trust His decisions in response to all our prayers.

It is clear that our study of concepts of God and of the nature of religious ideas makes place for pain and suffering, because we have hope for healing and an end to pain but our faith, and our practice do not readily accept the person who



may never walk again or those who are mentally challenged and may not be able to participate in normal social and other activities.

The New Testament records many miracles and healings wrought by Jesus yet not every disease and infirmity in His immediate proximity was removed; neither were all prayers for healing immediately answered, yet we do not say God no longer heals. We continue to trust Him in anticipation of the day when the infirmities of earthly existence drop away in the perfect light of His eternal presence. *What must be made clear to all is that we believe in divine healing and miracles today in this dispensation and beyond as it was in the beginning.- Divine healing has always been a part of the gospel.*

What is Disability

The term *Disability* is often used inter-changeably with *handicap*; both terms refer to one's ability to perform tasks because of mental or physical challenges. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) it is an umbrella term, covering impairments¹, activity limitations², and participation restrictions³. Disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. The 'differentness' of individuals from 'able-bodied' persons make disabilities difficult to be accepted by wider society and even family members.

Disability has evolved into a discipline that is being widely being studied by many institutions because there are different perspective/views and models on it. The models that are mostly associated with Christians are the *Moral and Social Models*.

The **Moral Model** refers to the attitude that people are morally responsible for their own disability. For example, the disability may be seen as a result of bad actions of parents if congenital, or as a result of practicing witchcraft if not. This attitude may also be viewed as a religious fundamentalist offshoot of the original animal roots of human beings when humans killed any baby that could not survive on its own in the wild. Echoes of this can be seen in the doctrine of karma in Indian religions.

The **Social Model** sees the issue of "disability" as a socially created problem and a matter of the full integration of individuals into society. In this model, disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the social environment. Hence, the management of the problem requires social action and is the collective responsibility of society at large to make the environmental modifications necessary for the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of social life. The issue is both cultural and ideological, requiring individual, community, and large-scale social change. From this perspective, equal access for someone with an impairment/ disability is a human rights issue of major concern. (<http://www.disabled-world.com/definitions/disability-models.php>)

¹ An *impairment* is a problem in body function or structure;

² an *activity limitation* is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action;

³ *participation restriction* is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.



Biblical attitude toward Disabilities:

According to *statement by the General Council of the assemblies of God of MO/USA* some speculate that God does not value persons with physical or mental defects or disabilities, and He particularly does not want such persons in spiritual leadership. This erroneous interpretation of God's impartial love and compassion is drawn by some from Leviticus 21:17-23: *"For the generations to come none of your descendants [Aaron's] who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the Lord by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the Lord, who makes them holy."*

The Aaronic priesthood as a group anticipated the perfect, sinless High Priest because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens meets our needs.

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself" (Hebrews 7:24-27). Now that the perfect High Priest has come to die for us, there is no longer need for physically perfect priests who foreshadowed the coming of the great High Priest.

Yet even apart from the restriction on impaired priests participating in ceremonies that looked toward the future, the priests with disabilities were still priests whose every need was taken care of by divine command: "He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food" (Leviticus 21:22).

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Countless healings in the Old and New Testaments provide proof of the compassionate nature of God, in spite of the fact that not all illnesses, diseases, or disabilities were removed. We find additional confirmation in other Scripture passages where the Israelites were admonished to show kindness to those who were deaf and blind (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18). Those who minister to the weak and helpless are blessed (Psalm 41:1). Jesus welcomed people with all manner of disabilities into the kingdom of God, even though they would have been excluded from service under the Old Testament (Matthew 4:23ff; 15:30). He instructed how to treat people with disabilities: "Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the



poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14).

Intellectual or what is commonly called Mental Retardation

Intellectual Disability once called mental retardation is characterized by below-average intelligence or mental ability and a lack of skills necessary for day-to-day living. People with intellectual disabilities can and do learn new skills, but they learn them more slowly. There are varying degrees of intellectual disability, from mild to profound.

Secular society has found ways to accommodate those with physical disabilities better than those who are mentally impaired. The church of Jesus Christ, the earthly representative of spiritual reality, should be the leader in providing opportunity for all people to connect with the Spirit of God. We do not fully understand the age of accountability and its application to persons with mental disabilities.

We do not understand how a person with a mental disability relates to God. But we must give opportunity for the Spirit of God to speak to such a person at his or her level of comprehension. Some demonstrate unusual levels of creativity in artistic expression. Many grasp spiritual realities and participate in worship and other church activities, especially in smaller groups. The church should provide such activities for those who can be introduced to genuine encounters with God’s presence.

How does God view people with disabilities?

I share the view of many that God determines both ability and disability. Exodus 4:11 states: “The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?’” The word picture of God as a potter and man as the workmanship of His hands is used in both the Old and New Testaments. It implies personal involvement and attention to detail, deliberate intent, and the specific design and purpose of the potter for each individual vessel. The potter forms the clay in a way that pleases Him. People with disabilities are not damaged goods. God takes full responsibility for their existence.

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What part does sin in a person's life or lack of faith play in the healing process? [If Any]

John 9 indicates there are times when God allows a person to have a disability so the power of God can be displayed at some point. In John 9 and Acts 3 that power came in the form of divine healing. There are other Scripture passages where God chose to display His power *through* a person’s weaknesses (1 Corinthians 1:27-29; 2 Corinthians 12:9). The individual with the disability is the best judge of his own spiritual condition, because he is the one the Holy Spirit will convict, if need be (John 16:8).



Why doesn't God heal everyone?

Ultimately, every Christian will experience a permanent release from all sickness, pain, and disability (1 Corinthians 15:43, 54). Because of this certainty of ultimate healing, every Christian who suffers can live with hope. We know God does heal today. We serve a God who does things “in the fullness of times” (Exodus 2:23-25; Galatians 4:4) and in perfect season (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Psalm 30:5).

The timing of an individual's healing and the means of that healing are subject to God. Healing is not at the 'whim' of individual believers. The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians about **Epaphroditus**⁴ who nearly died before he was healed (Philippians 2:27). Paul wrote to Timothy about taking a little wine medicinally for his stomach and other chronic ailments (1 Timothy 5:23). The apostle Paul could not heal people at will. The Old and New Testaments show that the timing of divine healing rests with God and usually occurs as people of His choosing can be impacted for His glory, or when He deems that the purpose for the affliction or disability is fulfilled. Therefore, it is best to view healing as a divine appointment with the divine Physician.

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What if a person is prayed for but doesn't get healed?

It is imperative that spiritual leaders exercise discernment when praying for people with disabilities, and not simply assume that their most pressing need is for physical healing. Likewise, those who pray should not judge the results of their prayer by what they see. They can never know, without

The physical or spiritual condition of people with disabilities should not be judged only on what our physical eyes

asking, how a person has been ministered to by the Spirit of God; remembering that people with disabilities often have internal physical disorders and dysfunction and often time experience the healing power of God, without being healed of their physical disability. For example, a young man with cerebral palsy was hit by a bus and was close to death. God healed his injuries, but not his disability. The Holy Spirit may also heal spiritual or emotional problems rather than physical ones

What is the expectation from Christ of the Church

The primary key to understanding and working with people with disabilities is building relationships with them. Developing friendship and trust encourages them to open up to the love of God. Such ministry fulfills the words of Jesus: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me

⁴ *Epaphroditus, the man who had carried a monetary gift from the Philippians church to Paul while the Apostle was imprisoned in Rome (Phil. 4:18), fell ill around the time Paul wrote to the Philippians (2:25-26).*



something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:35, 36). He could well have added, “I was different, yet you loved me.”

Ministering to Persons with Disabilities.

The response of the church is the Call to be Compassionate. The biblical command to “serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13) includes everyone. To view people with disabilities as flawed and defective, and possibly a divine mistake, is wrong for a church with Christ-like compassion. People with disabilities are platforms for the demonstration of His power to heal or His power to use weakness to display His strength.

Churches often ministers well to persons with acute illnesses and injuries, where the natural healing process and/or the Miracle of divine healing seems a possibility. But in situations where disability is long term or permanent, faith is challenged. Our faith and practice must include a compassionate hand extended to those with disabilities. The major challenges to church leadership are:

- (1) affirming and ministering to those with disabilities, while
- (2) encouraging congregational acceptance of them into church life and activity.

If we are to fulfill the Great Commission to preach the gospel to “every creature” (Mark 16:15, NKJV), we cannot overlook this segment of society although ministering to person with disabilities is challenging. Families, friends and Volunteers grow weary when there are limited positive responses remembering that God’s love for us persists even though *our* failures and disobedience keep recurring.

The church’s compassion may cost money to modify physical facilities required by Government regulations and standards that allow the physically handicapped access to public facilities. Our responsibility, as representatives of the kingdom of God include:-

- *those with disabilities in church functions and worship.*
- reserving easily accessible pews or aisle seats for people with physical limitations will say, “We want you to worship with us.”
- Ushers trained to show kindness to worshipers with physical and mental disabilities and to their caregivers demonstrates the seriousness of the church’s concern.
- discipling and equipping people with disabilities to use their gifts to build up the body of Christ is also a response to the church’s commission..
- *Ministry of care-giving.* Caregivers need our thanks. Sometimes those they care for don’t have the ability to say thank you. It is easy to become weary serving a family member who has a terminal illness or a permanent disability.

Knowing that God is all-powerful, caregivers may be tempted to blame the One who can make that person well, but doesn’t. Yet until He answers, they must trust the God who compassionately loves both the caregiver and the one with a disability.